

Message Text

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42

ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-04 USIE-00 SY-10 CIAE-00 INR-10

NSAE-00 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 L-03 TRSE-00 DRC-01

IO-14 SS-20 NSC-10 /100 W

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P 311640Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1920

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FOR STATE AND USIA

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SCUL, CM, US

SUBJECT: ART OBJECT FROM LAIKOM

REF: YAOUNDE 3580

1. I WAS CALLED TO FONOFF OCTOBER 31 TO SEE SEC GEN OWONO, WHO PRESENTED NOTE WHICH DESCRIBED ART OBJECT IN QUESTION AS "STOLEN...BELONGING TO A NATIONAL COLLECTIVE BODY...AND INTRODUCED INTO U.S. BY SMUGGLERS." NOTE REQUESTED EMBASSY TO ASK USG TO "STOP OR CANCEL SALE" AND "TO CONDUCT INQUIRY, PROSECUTE, AND SENTENCE GUILTY PARTIES." IT ALSO ASKED USG TO ORDER RESTITUTION OF STOLEN ART OBJECT TO GURC "BY VIRTUE OF DISPOSITIONS OF INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON PRODUCTION OF CULTURAL PATRIMONY OF MEMBER STATES."

2. OWONO TOLD ME THAT CAMEROONIAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON HAD BEEN REQUESTED TO MAKE A SIMILAR DEMARCHE TO DEPARTMENT. HE STRESSED PRESIDENT AHIDJO'S PERSONAL CONCERN AND INTEREST IN THE RETURN OF STATUE AND STATED THAT IT WAS AT PRESIDENT'S REQUEST THAT I HAD BEEN CALLED IN.

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3. I INFORMED OWONO I WAS AWARE OF NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE

BUT DID NOT YET HAVE FULL TEXT. I UNDERSTAND FROM DEPARTMENT THAT BUREAU OF CUSTOMS HAD PLACED A HOLD ON STATUE SO THAT FOR THE TIME BEING AT LEAST FURMAN CANNOT DISPOSE OF IT PENDING HIS ESTABLISHING THAT HE IMPORTED IT LEGALLY. I ADDED THAT I UNDERSTOOD THAT DEPARTMENT AND CAMEROONIAN EMBASSY OFFICIALS WERE TO HAVE MET OCTOBER 29 ON THIS ISSUE BUT I DID NOT YET HAVE A REPORT OF THAT MEETING.

4. I MENTIONED THAT N.Y. TIMES ARTICLE QUOTED FURMAN AS CLAIMING THAT HE PURCHASED STATUE OUTSIDE OF UNITED STATES AND IMPORTED IT LEGALLY. AS OWONO KNEW, MERE FACT THAT USG MIGHT WANT TO SEE STATUE RETURNED DID NOT MEAN THAT COURTS, IF MATTER PURSUED THROUGH LEGAL CHANNELS BY FURMAN, WOULD NECESSARILY GO ALONG. WAS GURC, I INQUIRED, IN POSITION TO FURNISH ANY DOCUMENTATION THAT WOULD ESTABLISH THE THEFT OF THE STATUE? OWONO REPLIED THAT HE ASSUMED SUCH PROOF OF THEFT EXISTED IN WEST CAMEROON WHERE THEFT TOOK PLACE. I SAID I WOULD LET HIM KNOW WHAT SUGGESTIONS IF ANY DEPARTMENT MIGHT HAVE WITH RESPECT TO SUBSTANTIATING DOCUMENTATION THAT MIGHT BE REQUIRED IN SUPPORT OF GURC CLAIM FOR RESTITUTION OF STATUE.

5. I ALSO ASKED OWONO IF GURC HAD GIVEN ANY THOUGHT TO TRYING TO BUY BACK STATUE. HE REPLIED THAT WHILE HE WOULD NOT RULE OUT SUCH A POSSIBILITY GURC'S CONTENTION WAS THAT THE STATUE REPRESENTED STOLEN GOODS, THAT IT SHOULD BE RETURNED TO THE COUNTRY, AND THAT PERPETRATORS OF THEFT SHOULD BE PUNISHED. IF THE PERPETRATORS WERE IN FRANCE RATHER THAN IN THE U.S., GURC WOULD PURSUE THAT ISSUE WITH GOF.

6. NYT CORRESPONDENT TOM JOHNSON HAS INFORMED US HE LEARNED IN PHONE CALL TO NEW YORK EARLIER TODAY THAT DEALER (FURMAN) SELLING STATUE BACK AT NOMINAL PRICE AND IT BEING RETURNED TO CAMEROON. ACCORDING TO HIS REPORT, NUMBER OF SOURCES HAD BEEN WILLING SUPPLY FUNDS TO REPURCHASE STATUE AND PRESIDENT AHIDJO HAD AUTHORIZED CAMEROON EMBASSY BUY STATUE BACK AT ANY PRICE NECESSARY. JUDGING FROM OWONO'S STATEMENT, IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL THAT GURC HAS MOVED THIS FAR.

7. EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE ASAP ANY SOLID AND HELPFUL FURTHER INFO WE MIGHT PASS TO FONOFF.
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MOORE

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